

James Monroe to Andrew Jackson, December 14, 1816, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

SECRETARY MONROE TO JACKSON.

Washington, December 14, 1816.

Dear Sir, I have since my last to you, had the pleasure of receiving two letters from you, the last of the 12th November. The advantage of the late treaties with the Indians is incalculable. One of the benefits, consists, in putting an end to all dissatisfaction on the part of Tennessee, proceeding from the former Treaty. This has been done on very moderate terms. Another, consists, in enabling the Government to bring to market, a large body of valuable [*sic*] land, whereby the Public debt may be considerably diminished. A third, in extending our settlements, along the mississippi, and towards the mobile, whereby, great strength will be added to our union, in quarters where it is most wanted. As soon as our population gains a decided preponderance in those regions, Florida, will hardly be considered by Spain, as a part of her dominions, and no other power would accept it from her as a gift. Our attitude, will daily become more imposing on all the Spanish dominions, and indeed on those of other powers in the neighbouring islands. If it keeps them in good order in our relations with them, that alone will be an important consequence. I have communicated what you have suggested, respecting Genl Coffee, and Lt Gadsden, to the President, who is, I am satisfied, well disposed to promote their views.¹

¹ This letter, with others of the same subject, was a copy made by Andrew J. Donelson and sent on to Washington to Eaton, who sent it to Gales and Seaton for publication in the *Intelligencer*. Eaton marked for omission the first paragraph, beginning "I have since

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my last", and the last paragraph but one, beginning "On the subject of fortifications". But Monroe when he saw the letter asked that it be printed entire. In compliance with this request Eaton appended the following note to Gales and Seaton: "I had thought it advisable to print only such parts of the Letter as referred to the subject as it is before the public: the President however desires that the whole be given. Disregard therefore those parts crossed by the pencil." The whole letter is printed, from a copy among the Monroe MSS. in the Library of Congress, in *Writings of James Monroe*, V. 341.

It is very gratifying to me to receive your opinions on all subjects on which you will have the goodness to communicate them, because I have the utmost confidence in the soundness of your judgement, and purity of your intentions. I will give you my sentiments on the interesting subject in question, likewise without reserve. I agree with you decidedly in the principle, that the chief magistrate of the country, ought not to be the head of a party, but of the nation itself. I am also of opinion, that the members of the Federal party, who left it in the late War, and gallantly served their country in the field, have given proofs of patriotism and attachment to free government, that entitle them to the highest confidence. In deciding, however, how a new Admn. ought to be formed, admitting the result to correspond with the wishes of my friend, many considerations claim attention, as on a proper estimate of them much may depend of the success of that Admn., and even of the republican cause. We have heretofore been divided into two great parties. That some of the Leaders of the Federal Party, entertained principles, unfriendly to our system of Govt. I have been thoroughly convinced; and that they meant to work a change in it, by takeing advantage of favorable circumstances, I am equally satisfied. It happened that I was a Member of Congress, under the confederation, just before the change made by the adoption of the present constitution, and afterwards of the Senate, beginning shortly after its adoption. In the former, I served three years, and in the latter, rather a longer term.² In these stations, I saw indications of the kind suggested. It was an epoch, at which the views of men, were most likely to unfold themselves, as if any thing favorable to a higher toned Govt. was to be obtained, that was the time. The Movement in France, tended

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also, then, to test the opinions and principles of men, which was disclosed in a manner to leave no doubt on my mind, of what I have suggested. No daring attempt was ever made, because there was no opportunity for it. I thought that Washington was opposed to their schemes, and not being able to take him with them, that they were forced to work, in regard to him, underhanded, using his name and standing with the nation, as far as circumstances permitted, to serve their purposes. The opposition which was carried on with great firmness, checked the career of this party, and kept it within moderate limits. Many of the circumstances on which my opinion is founded, took place in debate and in society, and therefore find no place in any Public document. I am satisfied however, that sufficient proof exists, founded on facts, and opinions of distinguished individuals, which became public, to justify, that, which I had formed.

2 Member of Continental Congress 1783–1785, U. S. senator 1790–1794.

The contest between the parties never ceased, from its commencement, to the present time, nor do I think that it can be said now to have ceased. You saw the height to which the opposition was carried in the late war; the embarrassment it gave to the Govt; the aid it gave to the enemy. The victory at New orleans, for which we owe so much to you, and to the gallant free men who fought under you, and the honorable peace which took place at that time, have checked the opposition, if they have not overwhelmed it. I may add, that the daring measure of the Hartford convention, which unfolded views, which had been, long before, entertained, but never, so fully understood, contributed also in an eminent degree to reduce the opposition to its present state. It is under such circumstances, that the election of a Successor to Mr Madison, has taken place, and that a new admn is to commence its service. The election has been made by the republican party, supposing that it has succeeded, and of a person known to be devoted to that cause. How shall he act? How organise the Admn., so far as dependent on him, when in that station. How fill the vacancies existing at the time?

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My candid opinion is that the dangerous purposes, which I have adverted to, were never adopted, if they were known, especially in their full extent, by any large portion of the Federal party, but were confined to certain leaders, and they principally to the eastward. The manly and Patriotic conduct of a great proportion of that party, in the other states, I might perhaps say, of all, who had an opportunity of displaying it, is a convincing proof of this fact. But still, Southern and Eastern Federalists, have been connected together as a Party, have acted together heretofore, and altho' their conduct has been different, of late, especially, yet the distinction between Republicans and Federalists, even in the Southern and middle and Western states, has not been fully done away. To give effect to free Government, and secure it from future danger, ought not its decided friends, who stood firm in the day of trial, to be principally relied on? Would not the association of any of their opponents in the Admn., itself, wound their feelings, or, at least, of very many of them, to the injury of the republican cause? Might it not be considered, by the other party, as an offer of compromise with them, which would lessen the ignomy due to the councils, which produced, the Hartford convention, and thereby have a tendency to revive that party on its former principles? My impression is, that the Admn should rest, strongly, on the republican party, indulging toward the other, a spirit of moderation, and evincing a desire to discriminate, between its members and to bring the whole into the republican fold, as quick as possible. Many men, very distinguished for their talents, are of opinion that the existence of the Federal party, is necessary to keep union and order in the republican ranks, that is, that free Government cannot exist without parties. This is not my opinion. That the ancient Republics, were always divided into parties; that the English Govt. is maintain'd by an opposition, that is, by the existence of a party in opposition to the ministry I well know. But I think that the cause of these divisions, is to be found in certain defects of those Governments, rather than in human nature; and that we have happily avoided those defects in our system. The first object is to save the cause, which can be done by those who are devoted to it, only, and of course by keeping them together; or, in other words, by not disgusting them, by too hasty an act, of liberality to the other party, thereby breaking the generous spirit of the republican party, and keeping alive, that of the Federal.

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The second is, to prevent the re-organization, and revival of the Federal party, which if my hypothesis is true, that the existence of parties is not necessary to free Govt., and, the other opinion which I have advanced, is well founded, that the great body of the Federal party are republican, will not be found impracticable. To accomplish both objects and thereby exterminate all party divisions in our country, and give new strength and stability to our Govt., is a great undertaking, not easily executed. I am nevertheless decidedly of opinion that it may be done, and should the experiment fail, I shall conclude, that its failure, was imputable, more to the want of a correct knowledge of all circumstances claiming attention, and of sound judgement in the measures adopted, than to any other cause. I agree, I think, perfectly with you in the grand object, that moderation should be shewn to the Federal party, and even a generous policy be adopted towards it; the only difference between us seems to be, how far shall that spirit be indulged in the onset, and it is to make you thoroughly acquainted with my views on this highly important subject, that I have written to you so freely on it. Of the Gentleman, of whom you have spoken, I think as you do, of which I gave him proof when in the dept of War, by placing him in the board of officers, for digesting and reporting a system of discipline for the army, and afterwards, by other tokens of confidence, and I add, with pleasure that I should be gratified, regarding the feelings and claims above stated, to find an opportunity, at a proper time hereafter (should the event in contemplation occur) to add other proofs of my good opinion and high respect for him.

In the formation of an admn, it appears to me, that the representative principle, ought to be respected, in a certain degree, at least, and that a Head of a dept (these being four) should be taken from the four great sections of the Union, the East, the middle, the South and the West. This principle should not be always adhered to—great emergencies and transcendent talents, would always justify a departure from it. But it would produce a good effect to attend to it, when practicable. Each part of the Union would be gratified by it; and the knowledge of local details, and means, which would be thereby brought into the cabinet, would be useful. I am no wise compromitted in respect to any one, but free to act,

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should I have to act, according to my judgement, in which I am thankful for the opinions of my friends, and particularly for yours.

On the subject of fortifications, or works for the defence of the coast and frontiers, an arrangement has lately been made, by the President, with which I wish you to be well acquainted. You have, heretofore, I presume, been apprised, that Genl Bernard, of the French corps of Engineers,³ under the recommendation of Genl Le Fayette, and many others of great distinction in France, had offer'd his services to the U States, and that the President had been authorised by a resolution of Congress, to accept them, confining his rank to the grade of the chief of our corps. This resolution being communicated to Genl Bernard, by the late Secy of War, to whom he was known, he came over in compliance with the invitation, which accompanied it. From Mr Gallatin he brought letters, stating that he was the 7th in rank in the corps, and inferior to none in reputation and talents, if not first. It required much delicacy in the arrangement, to take advantage of his knowledge and experience, in a manner acceptable to himself, without wounding the feelings of the Officers of our own corps, who had rendered such useful services, and were entitled to the confidence and protection of their country. The arrangement adopted will I think accomplish fully both objects. The President has instituted a board of officers, to consist of five members two of high rank in the corps, Genl Bernard, the engineer at each station (of young Gadsden for example at New Orleans), and the naval officer commanding there, whose duty it is made, to examine the whole coast, and report such works as are necessary for its defence, to the Chief Engineer, who shall report the same to the Secretary of War with his remarks, to be laid before the President. McKrae and Totten⁴ are spoken of, for the two first, who with Genl Bernard will continue till the service is performed;

³ Gen. Simon Bernard, lieutenant-general of engineers under Napoleon, was commissioned "assistant in the corps of engineers of the United States, with the rank of brigadier-general by brevet". Brig.-Gen. Joseph G. Swift, chief engineer of the army, thereupon resigned. Bernard remained in the service until 1830, constructing Fort Monroe

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and other coast defenses. In 1834 and from 1836 to 1839 he was Minister of War in France.

4 Lieut.-Col. William MacRea (see p. 46, note 1, ante), and Capt. Joseph G. Totten, chief engineer 1838–1864.

the two latter will change with the station. The Genl commanding each division will be officially apprised of this arrangement, that he may be present, when he pleases, and give such aid as he may think fit. The attention of the board will be directed, to the inland frontiers, likewise. In this way, it is thought that the feelings of no one can be hurt. We shall have four of our Officers, in every consultation, against one foreigner, so that if the opinion of the latter becomes of any essential use, it must be, by his convincing his colleagues, where they differ, that he has reason on his side. I have seen Genl Bernard, and find him a modest, unassuming man, who preferred our country in the present state of France, to any in Europe, in some of which he was offered employment, and in any of which he might probably have found it. He understands that he is never to have the command of the corps, but always will rank second in it.

This letter you will perceive is highly confidential, a relation which I wish always to exist between us. Write me as you have done, without reserve, and the more so, the more gratifying your communications will be

With great respect and sincere regard yours And. J. Donelson. I certify the foregoing to be a true copy.